

"Patience in Suffering"

What a title! I almost changed it. I mean, can you think of two things you want to hear about LESS than PATIENCE and SUFFERING.

However, as I look at the passage, that's all it's about!

The passage immediately preceding this one is about the wealthy taking advantage of the poor, and the one that follows is about leaning on the Lord and His godly followers to GET THROUGH SICKNESS and other ills.

If we truly ENGAGE this world with our convictions, we're going to experience PERSECUTION. We're eventually going to be hated and targeted for harm be it physical, emotional, occupational, or otherwise.

No matter how you slice it, suffering is inevitable, so we need this.

The OVERARCHING THEME of the passage is ENDURING HARDSHIP UNTIL THE RAPTURE, and I believe there's a lot of encouragement to be found here.

James 5:7-8

7 Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. 8 You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

"The farmer WAITS..." Wait implies EXPECTATION. No one waits for something they don't expect.

If you plant something in your garden, you don't till it up the next day! You WAIT because you know that something is going to result from the planting: FRUIT!

Tell me this, gardeners in the house, do you weed your garden in the off season? Did anyone spend any time weeding or watering your garden last week?

NO! Why would you? There's no point! You don't tend an unplanted garden.

You tend your garden BECAUSE something is coming. The HARVEST—the REWARD of your labor.

Everything you do—from prepping the soil, to planting, to weeding, to watering, to pruning—is all for a purpose: THE COMING HARVEST.

James' illustration teaches us that we're to LIVE IN EXPECTATION of Jesus' return. Even in the midst of difficulties and suffering...

"The early and the late rains" depict A SEASON, after which the one who is patient receives the REWARD for waiting.

Trials will dog us as long as we live on this earth, and you know what that means? The trials are TEMPORARY. They're just for a SEASON.

Just hang on! The reward is COMING! Jesus is coming!

SUFFERING IS ONLY FOR A SEASON! LIVE IN EXPECTATION OF THE SEASON'S END—THE COMING OF CHRIST.

James 5:9

Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.

Boy, I tell you, James can't get away from the TONGUE, can he?

So, now we back to the topic of MOUTHING OFF TO ONE ANOTHER in the CONTEXT OF SUFFERING.

What implication can we take from that?

DON'T LET YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES NEGATIVELY IMPACT YOUR BEHAVIOR—in this case, how you SPEAK to one another.

When times are hard, our tendency is to WHAT? Take our frustrations out on those around us, particularly those to whom we feel we can get away with it, those who are closest to us—our families.

Don't raise your hands, but how many of us (I'm including myself) find it easier to treat strangers and acquaintances with more kindness than our own families?

The old adage "Familiarity breeds contempt" holds true. So often it's the people who mean the most to us that are the easiest to treat the worst.

As Kevin says, "If you can't say 'amen,' say 'oh my.'" I say, "Amen" and "oh my."

THIS (motioning around) IS A FAMILY. We're the family of God, and because of our closeness, we sometimes give ourselves permission to let it all hang out when dealing with each other.

Don't you hate it when you catch an earful from someone who's having a bad day?

Bad days have a way of spreading that way. What's really TERRIBLE, is the person who just caught flack for who knows what could be having a worse day.

James remind us that the JUDGE IS COMING! Live in EXPECTATION. Don't be caught doing something that tears a brother or sister down when He comes.

Let's **ENCOURAGE** one another instead. Your brother, your sister, isn't the enemy.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

The comfort you've received from God in your suffering is NEEDED. Pass it on.

DON'T LET YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES CAUSE YOU TO TEAR INTO OTHERS; instead, lean into God for comfort, and then pass that comfort on to your brothers and sisters.

James 5:10-11

10 As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 11 Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

Jesus said...

Matthew 5:11-12

11 Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Keep in mind the most BASIC FUNCTION OF A PROPHET: he spoke in the Name of the Lord.

The prophets spoke TRUTH regardless of how it was received or how they were treated.

He didn't abandon his calling in the midst of suffering.

In James 5:11, the Greek phrase translated "we consider those blessed" can literally be translated:

1) a sign suggestive of anything, delineation of a thing, **representation, figure, copy** 2) **an example: for imitation** 2a) of **the thing to be imitated** 2b) for a warning, of a thing to be shunned

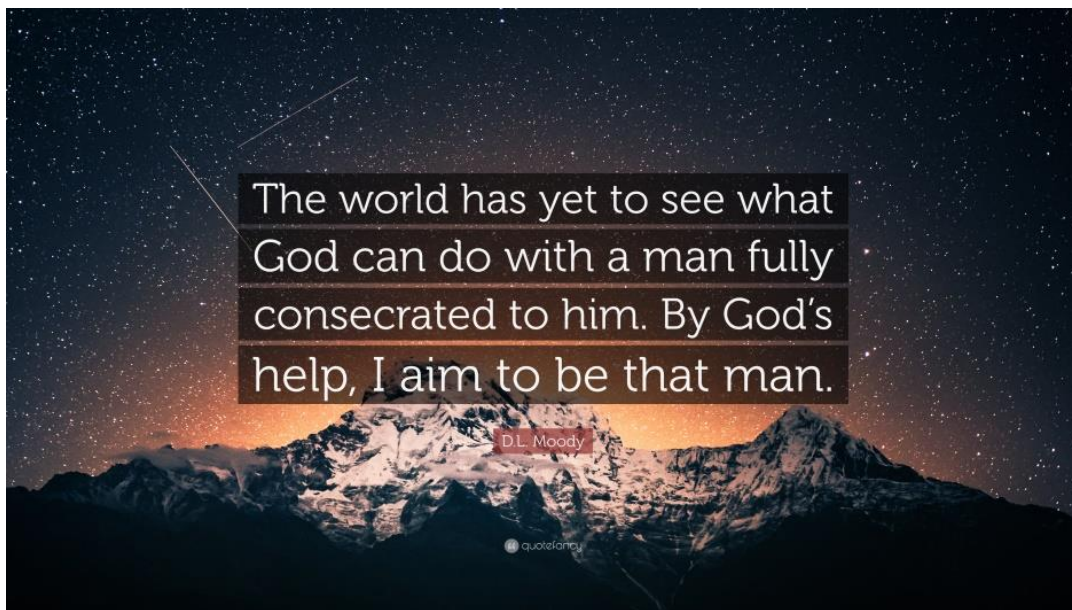
James is basically saying, "We really hold those saints of old in HIGH REGARD," but as he'll say of Elijah in just a few verses, "they were just ordinary people."

It's easy to look at SPIRITUAL GIANTS like DAVID OR PAUL, spiritual giants like D.L. MOODY OR BILLY GRAHAM and think, "I could never be like *THEM*."

But do you know what all those "spiritual giants" have in common? **THEY ALL STARTED OFF LOST** just like us.

There's nothing keeping you from the same life of divine intimacy and eternal impact.

As D.L. Moody said...



James refers to these saints of old, pointing out that we have the **EXAMPLE OF THEIR LIVES TO GO BY.**

As the farmer, we **LIVE EXPECTANTLY** of Christ's coming, knowing that **THE SUFFERING LASTS ONLY FOR A SEASON.**

We **DON'T LET CIRCUMSTANCES NEGATIVELY AFFECT OUR WALK.**

We **FOLLOW THE EXAMPLE OF THE SAINTS BEFORE US, PROCLAIMING TRUTH** in spite of suffering, knowing that **THEY STARTED THE SAME WAY WE DID.**

Then he brings up Job...

James 5:11

Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

JOB. Oh, boy... Does anyone else start to get anxious when someone starts teaching about Job? Is that just me?

Job is, without a doubt, the most severe example of earthly suffering that the Bible depicts.

And so, when someone begins teaching about Him, I'm like, "Oh, Lord. What's coming my way that You're preparing me for?" Seriously!

However, James brings him up for a reason, so let's talk about him. Let's talk about what his experience reveals about suffering...

Job opens with Satan sneaking into heaven among the angels. God confronts him, and then starts bragging on Job...

Job 1:8

And the LORD said to Satan, Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?

Satan argues that Job only fears God because everything in Job's life is good.

It's easy to be cool with God when everything's the way we want it, right?

"You are good, good, oh!"

But what about when things aren't good? James encourages us to do like Job when they're not.

So, Satan told God that Job only worshiped Him because Job's life was good. To prove Satan wrong, God PERMITTED Satan to afflict Job.

Job 1:12

12 And the LORD said to Satan, Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand. So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

And in the same day, Job lost ALL HIS WEALTH, and ALL HIS CHILDREN.

And his suffering didn't end there. Satan was later permitted to physically afflict Job with SORES and BOILS.

Then, as if that wasn't enough, Job's lousy "friends" lit into him. However, through it all, Job's response to the Lord never changed.

When the testing ended, the Bible says...

Job 42:10

And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.

What can we glean from Job's example?

Can we count on God to replace everything we lose and then some? Maybe even double our wealth? I wouldn't take it that far. That focus is earthly and selfish; we seek eternal rewards.

The truth we can walk in is:

1. **Suffering only enters our lives with God's permission. Remember, Job 1 showed us that Satan was and is on a leash.**

The devil can't touch us without the Lord's permission!

And understand, God wasn't wondering how Job would react to the coming trial.

This wasn't a bet with an uncertain outcome that both parties hoped they'd win.

This is God! He sits outside of time. Remember? He knew that, if He gave Satan permission to afflict Job, Job would still bless God.

God was proving something to Satan.

2. **God had a PURPOSE for the suffering.**

That means that the trial you're in, you've just come out of, or the one that's coming that you don't know about, **GOD SEES IT AND HAS A PLAN FOR IT!**

Therefore God KNOWS about the suffering and has a PURPOSE for it.

Satan proved wrong.

Even "righteous Job" still needed to grow. After Job had justified himself in light of the affliction he was facing, he called for an answer from God, a formal accusation (though he knew there was nothing he'd done wrong). Well, the Lord answered Job, and Job realized that he wasn't ready for it.

Job 42:1-6

1 Then Job answered the LORD and said:
2 I know that you can do all things,
and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.
3 Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?
Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.
4 Hear, and I will speak;
I will question you, and you make it known to me.
5 I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,
but now my eye sees you;
6 therefore I despise myself,
and repent in dust and ashes.

Did you catch that?! Job had lived a very moral life. He claimed that, before the trial, he had only heard of God. Now that he had gone through the trial, HE SAW HIM. **The trial Job faced made God's presence more real in his life!**

Job's "friends" definitely needed to grow (from witnessing Job's response to suffering).

Job 42:7

After the LORD had spoken these words to Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite: My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.

Outsiders and immature believers need to see how true followers of God handle suffering (like not to GRUMBLING against one another because of suffering as James exhorts)

3. **The testing comes before the blessing.**

Abraham – Gave up his son to receive him back

Joseph – sold into slavery and later imprisoned for NOTHING only to become like Pharaoh

Job – sure his family and wealth were restored, but he now had a better understanding of who God was

Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego – they loved the Lord, were still carried off into exile, faced persecution in the king's court, and after testing, were given great authority (similar to Joseph)

Jesus – He loved and told the truth, and He was hated and killed for it. He wasn't rescued from death; He went through it, and one day soon, He will receive His prize, His Bride.

4. **BIGGEST LESSON: Job shows us that, even when things are terrible, God is still good.**

James 5:11b

You have heard of the STEADFASTNESS of Job, and you have seen the PURPOSE of the Lord, how THE LORD IS COMPASSIONATE AND MERCIFUL.

"You're going to be okay." Hear me on this!

So many times, when we hear that someone is struggling, we might say, "I'm praying for you," or we might ask, "Can I help? Do you need anything?"

Those are tremendously encouraging things to say! Keep saying them! I just don't hear people say "You're going to be okay" very often. It's like we're not sure it's really the case. Or we don't think we have the authority to say it, or we think it will do more harm than good because the person we're saying it to can't see it.

Listen. Do you know Jesus? When suffering comes, will you lean into Him? Then you're going to be okay. It might not be today, tomorrow, or next year, but it will happen. You're going to be okay because God is and forever will be GOOD.

Finally, James says,

James 5:12

But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your yes be yes and your no be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

It's been stated throughout this series that James is, more or less, a commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, and, as it happens, James' brother spoke on this issue in that sermon as well.

Matthew 5:33-37

33 Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn. 34 But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 35 or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36 And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 Let what you say be simply Yes or No; anything more than this comes from evil.

Jesus said that anything more than "yes" or "no" came from evil, and James said it would fall under condemnation.

Are these passages about SWEARING? No, they're about the FUTILITY OF SWEARING.

Think about it. Why do people swear, either by taking an oath or adding an explicative to their statement?

They mistakenly believe that it adds seriousness and meaning to their declaration.

Peter did this, didn't he?

Matthew 26:73-74

73 After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you. 74 Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, I do not know the man. And immediately the rooster crowed.

And Peter knew he was lying!!! Yet, to sound more credible (somehow), he swore he was telling the truth. Clearly, swearing doesn't make a lie true.

And since they were told not to swear by the Lord's Name, people would swear by lesser objects, and that way, if they didn't follow through on what they said, at least God's Name wouldn't be defamed.

The last word in James' discourse on being patient in suffering is about **WALKING IN INTEGRITY**.

Jesus and James are saying, don't swear. Just FOLLOW THROUGH on your yes, and FOLLOW THROUGH on your no.

In other words, "Say what you mean, and mean what you say."

Let's put it another way. Instead of speaking in terms of swearing, let's say "promise."

Somehow, we act as if saying "I promise" makes something mean more.

However, we shouldn't have to say "I promise" to make us care more about what was committed. When asked to do something or not do something, we should be able to say, "Yes, I'll be there," or "No, I won't do that." The commitment should be treated just as importantly as if the words "I promise" had been said, and people should be able to trust our "yes" or "no" implicitly.

In essence, we're being told that everything we say is as good as a promise!

After all, that's how we view God's Word, isn't it? The scriptures are replete with God's "promises;" however, very few of them actually have God saying, "I promise."

We just read something that God said, and we call it a PROMISE. Why? Because we know God cannot lie, and that He will do whatever He has said.

That's to be us. Let your yes be yes, and your no be no, **"so that you may not fall under condemnation."** Condemnation for what? For not keeping your word!!!

It's no coincidence that just a dozen verses earlier, James says...

James 4:17

So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

So, what does James' discourse on PATIENCE IN SUFFERING teach us?

1. To live EXPECTING Jesus' return any moment (**ordering every act in light of that moment**), knowing the SUFFERING LASTS ONLY A SEASON.
2. Not to let CIRCUMSTANCES NEGATIVELY IMPACT your walk; don't "grumble," but ENCOURAGE.
3. To follow the EXAMPLE OF THE PROPHETS, proclaiming and living for Jesus in spite of suffering.
4. Job's trial reminds us that, in the midst of suffering, GOD IS IN CONTROL, and HE IS GOOD.
5. To WALK IN INTEGRITY regardless of difficult circumstances.

THIS IS SO HARD! This is a scary topic we're discussing! We're talking about how to live when life is hard and when the bottom potentially drops out!

It's in such times that we must WALK IN WHAT WE KNOW.

We must WALK IN TRUTH, not according to how we feel because our natural tendency when we're hurting is to withdraw.

It's like when you were a child and you got a splinter in your hand.

Mom or dad would offer to help remove it, but as soon as they would go to do it, we'd be like, "DON'T TOUCH IT!" pulling our hand away from the one who could truly help us.

As we pass through SEASONS OF SUFFERING, our DAD says, "Here, let Me see it. I'm here. Let Me help. It's going to be okay. YOU ARE GOING TO BE OKAY."

Even when you can't see it, and even when you don't feel it, the TRUTH is YOU'RE GOING TO BE OKAY.